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AUTHOR Thompson, Sandra; Thurlow, Martha; Parson, Lorien; Barrow, Sara

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ABSTRACT

This report presents findings from an investigation of the perceptions, hopes, and fears of educators as they work toward including students with disabilities in Minnesota's High Standards. The findings are from questionnaires and interviews that were conducted from January to March 1999, with 90 educators across all grade levels from ten schools within a large suburban school district. This study is one of the first in Minnesota to look at emerging efforts toward standards-based reform for students with disabilities. Results of the study indicate: (1) expectations for meeting standards are higher for students with disabilities who are served primarily through general education than for those served primarily in special education resource rooms; (2) most students with mental impairments (developmental disabilities) are not expected to meet high standards; (3) few elementary age students with disabilities use accommodations; (4) educators who have received training on the implementation of high standards are more likely to implement the high standards; and (5) middle school teachers expected a great number of their students to meet high standards, worked with more students on using accommodations, and discussed standards with more Individual Education Program teams than teachers at other grade levels. (CR)

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STATE ASSESSMENT SERIES
Minnesota Report 25

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Initial Perceptions of Educators as They Work Toward Including Students with Disabilities in Minnesota's High Standards

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MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF
Children, Families & Learning

STATE ASSESSMENT SERIES
Minnesota Report 25

Initial Perceptions of Educators as They Work Toward Including Students with Disabilities in Minnesota's High Standards

Minnesota Assessment Project

Project Staff:
Constance Anderson • Cathy Wagner
Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning

Project Advisors:
Leigh Schleicher • Barbara Jo Stahl
Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning

Kathryn Heinze
Hamline University

Prepared By:
Sandra Thompson • Martha Thurlow • Lorien Parson • Sara Barrow
University of Minnesota

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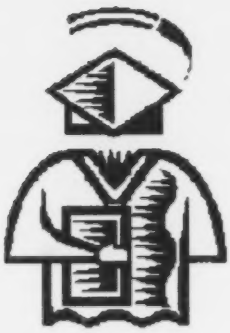

The Minnesota Assessment Project is a four-year, federally funded effort awarded to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The project's goal is to promote and evaluate the participation of students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities in Minnesota's Graduation Standards. Specifically, the project will examine ways in which students with limited English and students with disabilities can participate in the Basic Standards Exams of reading, mathematics and written composition and in the performance-based assessments of the high standards in the Profile of Learning.

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Overview

This report presents findings from an investigation of the perceptions, hopes and fears of educators as they work toward including students with disabilities in Minnesota's High Standards. The findings are from questionnaires and interviews that were conducted from January to March 1999, with educators across all grade levels from ten schools within a large suburban school district. This study is one of the first in Minnesota to look at emerging efforts toward standards-based reform for students with disabilities. It is part of the Minnesota Assessment Project, a four-year, federally funded effort to promote and evaluate the participation of students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities in Minnesota's Graduation Standards.

Minnesota's Graduation Standards

Minnesota is in the midst of a major educational reform. We are changing from a "teacher-centered" and "curriculum-based" educational system to a "student-centered" and "standards-based" system. The focus of the reform asks the questions:

- What are students expected to know?
- What should students be able to do?

Historically, Minnesota, like other states, awarded diplomas for credits earned by students based on hours of instruction and passing grades. Required subjects included language arts, social studies, mathematics, science, health, physical education, and various electives. Postsecondary institutions, employers, parents, and students themselves could not tell from a credit-based transcript what content had been mastered or how performance compared with that of students from other instructors, schools, or districts. Students going on to postsecondary education with "As and Bs" often found themselves unprepared for college work. Students with disabilities may have received high grades in "special ed" courses with names like "Biology" but were actually taught from a significantly "watered down" curriculum by special education teachers with little appropriate content expertise.

Over the years, many have realized that credit or course based graduation requirements alone rarely result in consistent opportunities to learn and demonstrate knowledge and skill. The lack of information about actual skills or knowledge required for a diploma has increased the call for results-based graduation requirements nationwide.

Minnesota's graduation standards now require students to meet or exceed basic and high standards of achievement to receive a diploma. To meet Minnesota's Basic Requirements, students must demonstrate competency in reading, writing, and mathematics. A series of content standards

define what students need to know and be able to do to achieve a high level of performance. To receive a diploma, a student must produce a record of work showing achievement in a number of the content standards. The High Standards are organized into ten learning areas (see Table 1).

Beginning in kindergarten, all public school students start learning skills and concepts to prepare them to achieve the high school level High Standards. Public high school students from the class of 2002 and beyond must complete 24 of 48 possible standards from the ten learning areas. Nine of the standards are required for all students. Twelve standards are chosen from groupings within the learning areas. For example, students must choose two of five different science standards. The remaining three standards are electives.

Student achievement of the High Standards is assessed by locally designed performance assessments. A performance assessment is made up of locally designed assignments that, taken together, show whether a student has learned and can apply the knowledge and skills outlined in the standard. These assignments ask students to apply their knowledge in real-world situations. Teachers assign students a score of 4, 3, 2, or 1 for each performance assessment package a student completes. Teachers score performance assessments by comparing a student's work with a description of the desired performance. Local school districts continue to determine course grades, grade point averages, and class rank.

Minnesota has developed rules pertaining to the inclusion of students with disabilities in high standards. These rules state that students with IEPs in kindergarten through grade 8 must have all primary, intermediate, and middle level preparatory content standards considered by the student's IEP team for inclusion in the student's IEP. A student's IEP team needs to consider high standards graduation requirements when a student with a disability is 14 years old or registers for grade 9. An IEP team also needs to consider a student's transition plan when determining which of the required and elective content standards a student will select.

Table 1. High Standards Learning Areas

1. Read, View, and Listen
2. Write and Speak
3. Arts and Literature
4. Math Applications
5. Inquiry
6. Scientific Applications
7. People and Cultures
8. Decision Making
9. Resource Management
10. World Languages—*optional*

For students with IEPs in kindergarten through grade 8, IEP teams may modify preparatory content standards. Teams need to define which parts of each content standard a student will work toward meeting. If a team determines that a student is to be exempt from one or more of the content standards, the exemption must be explained in the IEP. When exempt status is selected for a content standard, the team needs to determine whether a different standard or IEP goal specific to the learning area is appropriate and include that goal in the student's plan.

For a high school student with an IEP, the student's IEP team needs to:

(1) determine whether the student will pursue the content standard without modification;

(2) determine whether one or more of the 21 required content standards will be modified to an individual level;

(3) define the elective content standards that the student will also pursue and whether, for each elective, the student will pursue the content standard without modification, or the content standard modified to an individual level; or

(4) determine whether the student is exempt from one or more of the graduation requirements. When exempt status is adopted for a content standard, the team needs to determine whether a different standard or IEP goal specific to the learning area is appropriate and include that goal in the student's plan.

Congress used the 1997 reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 97) to clarify and reaffirm the rights of students with disabilities to receive a high quality education consistent with state education standards. IDEA 97 also stresses the right of students with disabilities to participate fully in the general curriculum with their non-disabled peers. The Committee Report that accompanied the new law to Congress explained the intent behind the changes. "The new emphasis on participation in the general education curriculum... is intended to produce attention to the accommodations and adjustments necessary for disabled children to access the general education curriculum and the special services which may be necessary for appropriate participation in particular areas of the curriculum" (U.S. Senate, 1997, p. 17). Not only must the IEP now contain a statement of how the child's disability will affect participation in the general curriculum, but it must explain why any student will *not* be participating in the general education classroom, as well as extracurricular and non-academic activities.

In addition, the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* and the *Improving America's Schools Act* represent a significant move toward including all students in education reform efforts. These Acts define "all students" as specifically including students with disabilities. The Acts also require standards to be developed in a way that will help all students reach higher standards, and assessments are to include all students.

Graduation Standards recognize that student learning also takes place outside of the classroom. Local school districts have policies and procedures to give students credit for standards achieved through extracurricular activities, activities outside of school, and community and work experiences. The information above and additional information about graduation standards can be obtained from the Department of Children, Families, and Learning web site: http://children.state.mn.us/grad/gradhom.htm.

Related Research

Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) conducted a study during the 1998-99 school year to evaluate how teachers understand and use standards in teaching and learning (Bemis & Wahlstrom, 1999). The study found that teachers who attended more than one training session were more likely to agree that they felt prepared to implement the standards. Most teachers surveyed (72%) noted that they felt overwhelmed by the standards, especially because of the demands on their time, complexity of the performance packages, changes in expectations from the state level, and the wide range of student abilities. Nearly half of the teachers stated that their feelings of being overwhelmed had decreased over time. Also, nearly half of the teachers who attended multiple training sessions reported that the implementation of the standards led to a difference in their teaching. Seventy-eight percent of the teachers surveyed believed that they would feel prepared to fully implement the standards within the next three years.

Another interesting survey question from the CAREI study asked teachers whether their beliefs about student capacity for learning had changed as a result of implementing standards. Several teachers wrote about their beliefs having shifted to become more positive due to unanticipated levels of student performance. These teachers also noted that doing individual assessments forced them to notice each student's strengths, and providing students with a variety of ways to demonstrate their knowledge gave each student more opportunities to "shine." In response to questions about the expectation of students with disabilities to achieve high standards, most teachers reported having some experience implementing the standards with students with disabilities and sought resources or advice to aid in identifying accommodations for the assessment of these students, although many were not sure whether the accommodations were successful.

In a study conducted by CRESST (Aschbacher, 1993), factors that facilitated development and implementation of standards-based instruction and assessment, and barriers teachers and administrators faced were delineated. Factors that facilitated development included:

- *Purposeful passion.* A strong commitment among practitioners was one of most important factors found in this study.

- *Being part of a group.* Teachers needed to be part of a group to meet and share ideas and support, but it was difficult to find time to meet often enough.

- *Administrative support.* The driving force behind the implementation of standards was a strongly committed district office that was willing to find funding for teachers' professional development, look beyond the district to find necessary expertise, and set up task forces to carry out major development tasks.

- *Sustained technical assistance.* This was found to be important to make good ideas succeed.

- *Results.* The study found increased teacher expectations for students, changes in curriculum and instruction, increased collegiality and professionalism, and positive effects on students' self esteem.

Factors that the CRESST study found to be barriers to development included:

- *Emphasis on learning activities rather than outcomes.* Teachers were able to brainstorm general goals for students, but reluctant to articulate specific student outcomes to be measured. When asked to share assessments, they tended to describe tasks, omitting mention of intended student goals. The study found that teachers and administrators were more comfortable when they were held accountable for simply covering important curriculum content rather than for improving student achievement.

- *Difficulties specifying criteria for judging student work.* Teachers were not comfortable with judging student work in a rigorous manner or being held accountable for those judgments. In the study, teachers spent time discussing student activities rather than criteria for judging student performance. Researchers found rare examples of teachers who were comfortable with intense reflection, deep conceptual involvement, and complex student outcomes rather than simple content coverage.

- *Assessment anxiety.* Teachers were well aware that grading had consequences for students and implications for themselves professionally. They preferred not to give portfolios a grade, stating that they did not want to penalize students for their own inexperience with the portfolio process.

- *Lack of time.* There was strong consensus in all study sites that lack of time (and money to pay for that time) was a very critical barrier to developing and implementing standards and performance assessments. Teachers felt they needed time to learn about and grow comfortable

with performance assessments, develop or review and select them, use them in the classroom, be trained to rate student work, do the scoring, and synthesize results of more complex assessments to make instructional and program decisions.

- *Need for training and ongoing support* on how to develop and implement performance assessments in schools. Teachers needed a great deal of information, practice, models, feedback, and encouragement to grasp the notion of new assessments and attempt to use them in their classes.

Students with Disabilities and High Standards

Over the past 20 years, we have seen extensive efforts to reform education at all levels, with increased emphasis on accountability for results. States are setting standards for student performance, and are either relying on existing state assessment systems or developing new assessment systems to monitor educational progress. Unfortunately, these systems are excluding large numbers of students with disabilities. State special education involvement in standards-based reform is highest for practices directly related to students with disabilities, such as aggregating results of alternate assessments with general assessment results. There is little involvement when the inclusion of students with disabilities is seen as detrimental, such as when there are rewards and sanctions for accountability results. (Thompson & Thurlow, 1999; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, Gutman, & Geenan, 1998).

McLaughlin, Nolet, Rhim, and Henderson (1999) were interested in studying the effects of general education reforms on students with disabilities. In-depth case studies were done in several districts across five eastern states. Special education and regular education teachers and administrators were interviewed about how the standards were affecting curriculum and instruction in their classrooms and how students with disabilities were participating in the standards. Researchers found that, generally, teachers and administrators expected most students with disabilities to participate in and be assessed in the standards. They believed that students with low incidence disabilities would require individualized standards. There was more concern over the participation and performance of students with high incidence disabilities and low achieving students. Concerns were greater at the secondary level, due to greater academic demands and less flexibility in the curriculum. There was a higher level of concern in states where the standards were tied to high school graduation.

McLaughlin et al. (1999) categorized comments about the effects of standards on students with disabilities into the following general areas:

- *Providing access to a broad and balanced curriculum.* Special education teachers believed

that the inclusion of students with disabilities in the standards lead to exposure to a variety of subject matter. In addition, they believed that the emphasis on authentic assessment, problem solving, and project-based learning inherent in the standards was beneficial for students with special learning needs.

- *Focusing instruction.* Special education teachers thought that the standards helped them to focus their instruction and be explicit about requirements. They thought the standards would lead to more challenging learner goals for students with disabilities and those students would be pushed beyond the goals of their IEPs. They also thought the standards would lead to a set of clear expectations across grades and schools.

- *Competing priorities.* Special education teachers were concerned about finding the instructional time and opportunities to help students with disabilities learn the new content as well as teaching them skills that would be functional for their own unique needs and learning styles.

- *Increased collaboration.* General education teachers reported that the standards lead to increased communication with each other. In addition, all teachers indicated that the standards gave them a common language with which to discuss individual students. All believed that collaboration was easier in the elementary school setting. Collaboration was also easier when special education teachers were members of instructional teams or departments.

- *Time and curricukar modifications.* Both special and regular education teachers reported uncertainty over when to modify a standard versus using an accommodation. All also were concerned about the instructional time required to teach the standards.

McLaughlin et al. (1999) concluded that all of the findings suggested that special education teachers need a framework for understanding general education curriculum as well as accessing that curriculum. There also must be opportunities for special and regular educators to collaborate to determine the breadth and depth of instruction necessary to help students with disabilities meet standards.

Method

Setting

The research for this project was based in a large suburban school district in Minnesota. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted with 90 educators across four elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. We selected this district for the study because its size allowed for diversity in lifestyles and educational programming. In addition, the district

was chosen because of its willingness and commitment to high standards and accountability. We also found every researcher's dream within the district—two special education coordinators who were willing to work with us throughout the data collection process on scheduling and staff participation. This study would not have been possible without their assistance and support.

The study took place from January to March 1999. Unfortunately, these were the same months in which the Minnesota Legislature was in session. During this session, the House of Representatives passed a bill completely abolishing the graduation standards, and reverting to course requirements. The Senate wanted to keep the standards, with some major revisions. In the end, a compromise could not be reached within the conference committee, so the standards stood as written for another year. It is likely that the results of this study were influenced by this political uncertainty.

Subjects

Permission to participate in the study was requested from every building within the district and obtained from ten schools. Respondents included 90 educators representing special and general education as well as related services. Personnel included in the study were those who attended regularly scheduled special education staff meetings at each school building plus a few general educators who were specifically invited to participate in the study. As shown in Table 2, the majority of respondents were special education teachers. Table 3 shows that special education teachers worked with students with learning disabilities, mental impairments, or speech impairments. Respondents were fairly evenly dispersed across grade levels (Table 4).

Procedures

Researchers visited each school, distributed questionnaires, and interviewed groups of staff members during regularly scheduled meetings. The entire process took 20-30 minutes at each

Table 2. Positions of Respondents

Title	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Special Education Teacher	62	69
General Education Teacher	5	6
Special Education Supervisor/coordinator	2	2
School Administrator	18	20
Related Service Provider	3	3
Total	**90**	**100**

Table 3. Disability Areas Represented by Respondents

Disability Area	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Learning Disabilities	10	11
Mental Impairment	7	8
Speech Impairment	17	19
None (or not a teacher)	23	26
More than 1 category of disability	33	36
Total	**90**	**100**

Table 4. Grade Levels Taught by Respondents

Grade Level	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Kindergarten – 5th grade (elementary)	18	20
6th – 8th grade (middle school)	14	15
9th – 12th grade (high school)	16	18
Other (multiple levels or non-teacher)	42	47
Total	**90**	**100**

school. Respondent participation was specifically planned to be brief in order to be the least intrusive to the important schedules of educators. Two researchers conducted each session. They first described the study to respondents, then distributed the questionnaires to be completed on the spot. Respondents were given approximately 10 minutes to complete the 16-item questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, respondents were requested to answer four questions as a group. Each group took 10-15 minutes to respond to all four questions. Responses were recorded in a written format by the researchers. The questions included:

- In an ideal world, what would it take to help students with disabilities meet high standards?
- What are you working on to bring this to reality?
- What do you see as barriers?
- What are you doing/planning to overcome the barriers?

Results

Primary Responsibilities

The first group of survey questions referred to the primary responsibilities of educators and whether those responsibilities had changed since the high standards were mandated at the

beginning of the school year. Comparisons were made by title of the respondents (Table 5), grade level taught (Table 6), and disability of students taught (Table 7). Overall, we found that the primary responsibilities of educators and administrators were still fairly traditional. General education teachers taught in classrooms, most special education teachers and related service providers taught in separate classrooms or resource rooms, and administrators spent most of their time performing administrative duties. About half of the respondents thought that their responsibilities had changed somewhat since the new standards were mandated. The other half had not noticed any change in responsibility.

Results of the analysis of primary responsibilities by grade level taught showed that, at the elementary school level, all special educators surveyed provided special education services in a

Table 5. Primary Responsibilities by Title

Title	Primary Responsibility	Change in Responsibility with High Standards
General Education Teacher	100% of respondents taught in general education classrooms	46% changed 64% no change
Special Education Teacher	69% of respondents taught in special education or resource rooms 31% of respondents team taught or consulted with general educators	54% changed 46% no change
Related Service Provider (i.e., speech therapist, school psych, occupational or physical therapist	64% of respondents taught in special education or resource rooms 36% of respondents team taught or consulted with general educators	50% changed 50% no change
School Administrator	100% of respondents had administrative duties	57% changed 43% no change

Table 6. Primary Responsibilities of Special Educators by Grade Level

Grade Level	Primary Responsibility of Special Educators
Elementary	100% of respondents taught in special education or resource rooms
Middle School	42% of respondents taught in special education or resource rooms 58% of respondents team taught or consulted with general educators
High School	60% of respondents taught in special education or resource rooms 40% of respondents team taught or consulted with general educators

Table 7. Primary Responsibilities of Special Educators by Student Disability

Disability Category	Primary Responsibility of Special Educators
Mental Impairment	100% of respondents taught in special education or resource rooms
Learning Disability	71% of respondents taught in special education or resource rooms 29% of respondents team taught or consulted with general educators
More than One Disability Category	63% of respondents taught in special education or resource rooms 37% of respondents team taught or consulted with general educators
Speech Impairment	53% of respondents taught in special education or resource rooms 47% of respondents team taught or consulted with general educators

"pullout" environment, that is, students were removed from their general education classrooms to receive special education services individually or in small groups in a special education classroom or resource room. At the middle school level, a greater number of teachers provided special education services within general education classrooms through team teaching or consulting (58%), with 42% providing services in special education or resource rooms. At the high school level 40% of the special education teachers provided services through team teaching and consulting models and 60% pulled students from general education classes for services (see Table 6).

An analysis of the primary responsibilities of special educators by the disabilities of the students they taught (Table 7) showed that teachers of students with mental impairments provided all services in special education or resource rooms. Just under one third of the teachers of students with learning disabilities (29%) provided services within general education classrooms through team teaching or consulting, with two thirds (71%) providing services in special education or resource rooms. Educators working with students representing more than one disability were found in general education classrooms team teaching or consulting at a slightly higher rate (37%) than those teaching students with learning disabilities. The highest percentage of special education teachers team teaching or consulting with general educators was found among speech clinicians (47%).

Expectation to Meet Standards

One of the concerns often expressed is that the expectations of special educators for students with disabilities to meet high standards are too low. In order to validate this concern, we asked respondents what percent of the students with disabilities they work with could meet high standards at the state level and what percent they thought would need to be exempt from some or all of the high standards (see Table 8). Overall, 57% of the respondents thought that less than

half of their students could meet the high standards at the state level. However, only 23% of the respondents thought that at least half of their students would be exempt from some or all of the high standards. Tables 9 and 10 show these expectations by grade level and disability.

As shown in Table 9, about half of the special education teachers at the elementary school level (58%) thought that at least half of their students with disabilities could meet high standards at the state level. This expectation dropped to 42% of special education teachers at the middle school level, and down to 37% of special education teachers at the high school level.

Most teachers at all grade levels thought that few students (less than 25%) would be exempt from meeting some or all of the high standards (75% of teachers at the elementary level, 79% at

Table 8. Number and Percent of Respondents Expecting Students to Meet or be Exempt from High Standards

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents	Percent of Students
Meet High Standards at the State level	32	36%	0-25%
	19	21%	25-50%
	20	22%	50-75%
	18	20%	75-100%
	1	1%	no response
Exempt from Some or all High Standards	62	69%	0-25%
	6	7%	25-50%
	8	9%	50-75%
	13	14%	75-100%
	1	1%	no response

Table 9. Percent of Special Education Teachers Expecting Students to Meet Standards by Grade

	Meet Standards at the State Level		Exempt from Meeting Some or all Standards	
Grade level	% of teachers	% of students	% of teachers	% of students
Elementary	25%	0-25%	75%	0-25%
	17%	25-50%	8%	25-50%
	25%	50-75%	0	50-75%
	33%	75-100%	17%	75-100%
Middle School	29%	0-25%	79%	0-25%
	29%	25-50%	7%	25-50%
	13%	50-75%	7%	50-75%
	29%	75-100%	7%	75-100%
High School	31%	0-25%	62%	0-25%
	31%	25-50%	19%	25-50%
	31%	50-75%	0	50-75%
	6%	75-100%	19%	75-100%

Table 10. Percent of Special Education Teachers Expecting Students to Meet Standards by Disability

	Meet Standards at the State Level		Exempt from Meeting Some or all Standards	
Disability	% of teachers	% of students	% of teachers	% of students
Teach students with Learning Disabilities	40% 20% 30% 10%	0-25% 25-50% 50-75% 75-100%	70% 10% 10% 10%	0-25% 25-50% 50-75% 75-100%
Teach students with Speech Impairments	41% 12% 35% 12%	0-25% 25-50% 50-75% 75-100%	70% 18% 0 12%	0-25% 25-50% 50-75% 75-100%
Teach students from several categories	44% 11% 11% 34%	0-25% 25-50% 50-75% 75-100%	62% 19% 0 19%	0-25% 25-50% 50-75% 75-100%
Teach students with Mental Impairments	86% 14% 0 0	0-25% 25-50% 50-75% 75-100%	14% 0 0 86%	0-25% 25-50% 50-75% 75-100%

the middle school level, and 62% of teachers at the high school level). Teachers at the middle school level, where the majority of students are educated within general education settings, also had the highest expectations for students completing standards at the state level and the lowest expectation for exemptions.

Table 10 shows the percent of teachers of students with specific disabilities who expected students to meet standards at the state level, or who were expected to be exempt from meeting some or all of the high standards. Forty percent of teachers of students with learning disabilities thought that at least half of their students could meet the high standards. Most teachers (70%) thought that less than a quarter of their students would be exempt from meeting high standards. These expectations were similar for teachers of students with speech impairments and for teachers working with students from more than one disability category. Expectations for students with mental impairments (developmental disabilities) were quite a bit lower. None of the teachers of students in this group expected over half of their students to meet the high standards at the state level, and most (86%) of these teachers expected at least 75% of their students to be exempt from some or all of the standards.

Use of Accommodations

As inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reform increases, more information and guidelines on the use of accommodations have become available. We were interested in finding out what percentage of the students served by respondents in this study used accommodations in their work on high standards and who typically helped them learn about and use accommodations. Forty-three percent of the respondents reported that less than 25% of their students used accommodations (Table 11). About three fourths of all of the respondents said that special educators generally helped students learn about and use accommodations.

At the elementary level, most teachers agreed that few of their students (less than 25%) used accommodations. This changed at the middle school level where the majority of respondents (62%) said that at least half of their students used accommodations. At the high school level, however, only 34% of the respondents said that more than half of their students used accommodations (Table 12).

The majority of participants (60%) said that over half of their students with learning disabilities used accommodations (Table 13). The next highest group was speech, where 30% of the teachers said that over half of their students used accommodations. Teachers of students with mental impairments and those working with students representing more than one disability category said that very few students used accommodations.

IEPs and High Standards

Table 14 shows that student participation in the high standards has been discussed by most of the respondents at IEP team meetings (71%). However, fewer respondents had actually begun to integrate standards into IEPs (61%). In an analysis of this discussion by grade (Table 15), it appears that the highest percent of respondents discussing student participation with IEP teams was at the middle school level. There was little variation by grade as to the integration of

Table 11. Percent of Students Using Accommodations in Their Work Toward High Standards

		Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
What percent of the students you work with use accommodations in their work toward high standards?	0-25%	39	43%
	25-50%	11	12%
	50-75%	15	17%
	75-100%	21	23%
	No response	4	5%
Who generally helps students learn about and use accommodations?	General educators	20	22%
	Special educators	67	74%
	No response	4	4%

Table 12. Use of Accommodations by Grade Level

	Use Accommodations	
Grade	Percent of teachers	Percent of students
Elementary	84%	<25%
	8%	>25%
	0	> 50%
	8%	> 75%
Middle	38%	<25%
	0	> 25%
	31%	> 50%
	31%	> 75%
High	33%	< 25%
	33%	>25%
	7%	>50%
	27%	> 75%

Table 13. Use of Accommodations by Disability

	Use Accommodations	
Disability	Percent of teachers	Percent of students
Learning Disability	0	<25%
	40%	> 25%
	30%	> 50%
	30%	>75%
Speech Impairment	58%	< 25%
	12%	> 25%
	18%	> 50%
	12%	> 75%
More than 1 Disability Category	75%	< 25%
	0	> 25%
	0	> 50%
	25%	> 75%
Mental Impairment	72%	< 25%
	14%	> 25%
	0	>50%
	14%	> 75%

Table 14. Number and Percent of Respondents Discussing Standards with IEP Teams and Integrating Standards into IEPs

Survey Question	Responses	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
Have you been on IEP teams that have discussed student participation in the high standards?	Yes No No response	71 18 1	79% 20% 1%
Have you begun to integrate the high standards into IEPs?	Yes No No response	61 29 0	68% 32% 0%

Table 15. Percent of Respondents Discussing Standards with IEP Teams and Integrating Standards into IEPs by Grade

Survey Question	Elementary	Middle School	High School
Have you been on IEP teams that have discussed student participation in the high standards?	Yes = 67% No = 34%	Yes = 79% No = 21%	Yes = 60% No = 40%
Have you begun to integrate the high standards into IEPs?	Yes = 58% No = 42%	Yes = 50% No = 50%	Yes = 60% No = 40%

standards into IEPs, with about half responding "yes" and half "no" across grade levels. There was also little variation by disability (Table 16), with about the same percentages of respondents discussing standards at IEP meetings and integrating standards into IEPs. The greatest variation was found with teachers of students with mental impairments where, even though 71% had discussed standards with IEP teams, only 43% had actually begun integrating standards into IEPs.

Table 16. Percent of Respondents Discussing Standards with IEP Teams and Integrating Standards into IEPs by Disability

Survey Question	Speech Impairment	Learning Disability	Mental Impairment	More than 1
Have you been on IEP teams that have discussed student participation in the high standards?	Yes = 82% No = 18%	Yes = 80% No = 20%	Yes = 71% No = 29%	Yes = 71% No = 29%
Have you begun to integrate the high standards into IEPs?	Yes = 82% No = 18%	Yes = 80% No = 20%	Yes = 43% No = 57%	Yes = 88% No = 12%

High Standards Development and Training

The groups least involved in the development of high standards implementation plans at the school and district level were special educators and related service providers (Table 17). Table 18 shows that these two groups have also received the least amount of training on strategies to implement high standards. Overall, educators across all grade levels have had less than 3 days of training on the high standards (Table 19). Table 20 shows a positive relationship between the amount of training on high standards special educators have had and the percent of teachers who have begun to integrate the high standards into their IEPs.

The final question about training asked who provided training. Over half of the respondents said that district staff provided training. The other half of the respondents said training was provided by special education team trainers, MEEP (Minnesota Education Effectiveness Program) and other state and regional trainers (Table 21).

Table 17. Percent of Respondents Involved in the Development of Standards by Title

Title	Don't know anything about standards	Know about standards, but not involved in development	Involved by giving feedback about district plans	Involved in development of district plans
All Respondents	7%	46%	37%	8%
School Administrators	0	0	75%	25%
General Education Teachers	0	0	75%	25%
Special Education Teachers	8%	52%	33%	7%
Related Service Providers	12%	57%	25%	6%

Results of Small Group Discussions

In an ideal world...

The small group interview sessions began with the question: "In an ideal world, what would it take to help students with disabilities meet high standards?" Overwhelmingly, school by school and grade by grade, teachers responded that in an ideal world, they would have enough TIME—time to learn about performance assessments, time for collaboration between general and special education, and time (with plenty of staff) to assist individual students with accommodations and modifications (see Table 22). At the elementary level, staff felt that, in an ideal world they would clearly understand and be able to use accommodations and modifications. A few teachers

Table 18. Amount of Training on High Standards Received Over the Past Year by Title

Title	0-4 hours of training	4-12 hours of training	12-24 hours of training	24-40 hours of training	More than 40 hours of training
All Respondents	47%	37%	10%	3%	3%
School Administrators	0	0	20%	20%	60%
General Education Teachers	0	80%	20%	0	0
Special Education Teachers	46%	37%	11%	0	0
Related Service Providers	63%	31%	6%	0	0

Table 19. Amount of Training on High Standards Received Over the Past Year by Grade Level

Grade Level	0-4 hours of training	4-12 hours of training	12-24 hours of training	24-40 hours of training	More than 40 hours of training
Elementary	25%	42%	25%	0	8%
Middle School	54%	30%	8%	8%	0
High School	31%	50%	13%	6%	0

Table 20. Amount of Training on High Standards Received Over the Past Year by Standards Integration into IEPs by Special Educators

	0-4 hours of training	4-12 hours of training	12-24 hours of training	24-40 hours of training
Standards Integrated into IEPs	63%	67%	75%	100%
Standards NOT Integrated into IEPs	37%	33%	25%	0

Table 21. Who Were the Trainers?

Trainers	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
District staff	46	51%
Special Education Team Trainers	24	27%
Other regional trainers	6	7%
MEEP trainers	5	5%
Other	5	5%
No response	4	5%

Table 22. Summary of Responses to Discussion Questions, "In an ideal world, what would it take to help students with disabilities meet high standards?"

Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Time – to learn about standards and performance assessment Time – for collaboration between general and special educators Time and enough staff – to make individualized accommodations and modifications		
Clear understanding of accommodations and modifications	General education staff well trained on use of accommodations	General education staff well trained on use of accommodations
Acknowledgement that some students can never meet standards because of the severity of their disabilities	Meeting standards is unrealistic and too frustrating for some students	Students with disabilities need more work on basic skills
	Students set goals for meeting standards	Students understand impact of meeting standards on their lives
	Existing curriculum is used to work toward standards	Students have time to meet basic and high standards
	Hands-on instruction, less written work	Individualized instruction and support
	Teachers have less paperwork	Less paperwork and less bureaucracy
		Parent support and internet access at home

indicated that even in an ideal world, there were some students with disabilities so severe that they would never be able to meet high standards.

At the middle school level, some teachers believed that, with smaller caseloads, students would get support to set goals for themselves that would guide their progress toward meeting high standards. Students would have examples of work toward standards to use as models to build toward. There would be little extra paperwork. Some teachers wished everyone understood that some of the existing curriculum could be used to help students work toward standards, and that hands-on instruction is more effective than paper/pencil tasks, especially in areas like career exploration. Some teachers expressed that meeting standards was unrealistic and too frustrating for some students with disabilities.

Parent support, with Internet access at home, was high on the "ideal" list at the high school level, along with enough staff to provide direct instruction and 1:1 support for students. High school personnel also added that, in an ideal world, students with disabilities would understand the impact that meeting standards would have on their lives, and they would have enough time during their high school years to develop basic skills and meet required standards.

Barriers to Implementation of the High Standards

Barriers at this early stage of implementation were plentiful (Table 23). Time, once again, came up in every school at every age level. Teachers were frustrated by the lack of time to do paperwork, create accommodations and modifications, work with individual students, and collaborate with each other. One frustrated high school teacher said he needed more time to tell the legislature that standards were never going to work.

At the elementary school level, teachers did not know which accommodations would work best for which students and worried about over- and under-accommodating. They were also experiencing some redefinition of roles between general and special educators and were not sure what their roles currently should be.

Middle school respondents were also experiencing some confusion about the definition and use of accommodations versus modifications and exemptions. They expressed concern about the anxiety experienced by parents who lacked clear information about standards and testing and feared that negative parent attitudes would undermine student participation. Some middle school

Table 23. Barriers to Implementation of the High Standards

Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Not enough time to write IEPs	Not enough time to modify packages	Not enough time for paperwork
Not enough time to create accommodations	Lack ideas and models	Not enough time for scheduling
Don't know which accommodations work best for individual students	Parents are anxious about standards and tests	Roles of special education vs. general education unclear
Not enough time to provide individualized instruction to students	Parent attitudes undermine student participation	Don't like waiting for people to tell us what to do
Not enough time for collaboration between general and special education staff	Too much written work in performance assessments	Too much time spent making sure IEPs are in compliance
Don't know roles of general vs. special education staff	Students lack motivation to complete performance tasks	Projects are an add-on, not part of curriculum
	Standards are too difficult for many students with disabilities	General education teachers don't know how to individualize for students with disabilities
	Don't understand difference between exempt, modify, accommodate	
	Staff shortage prohibits attending training during school day	
	Inconsistencies in requirements from state and district	

teachers were seeing "performance" being defined too narrowly as simply "writing" and found students lacking motivation for completing complicated writing tasks. Finally, a lack of opportunity for training was a concern because people were not getting the most current information, increasing confusion about what they were supposed to be doing.

High school participants did not appear to have enough experience implementing standards to be able to clearly articulate barriers. They focused on generalities like, "not enough time for paperwork," and "don't like waiting for people to tell us what to do." As with staff in younger grades, the roles of special and general educators had become less clear and educators wondered who should be doing what.

Overcoming Barriers and Meeting Ideals

Thinking about what they were working on to bring the above ideals to reality was difficult for some of the personnel interviewed. Statements like, "We need more time" were common and it was hard to shift the focus to *how* more time could be obtained. Other frustrated comments like, "too much money has been spent on this," "this is just a new name for the same old thing," and "I hope standards will just go away" needed to be expressed before useful strategies could be discussed. However, several positive and practical strategies were brought to light (see Table 24). At the elementary school level, strategies for using accommodations and modifications included giving lists of ideas to parents; individualizing approaches, offering extra repetition; modifying tasks to meet student needs; and documenting strategies on a student's IEP. Collaboration between general and special educators was increased through several strategies, including: after-school meetings, special education staff attending general education meetings, and special education staff working with small groups of students needing help within general education classrooms. Some teachers were working on lowering or extending standards so that all students could be successful.

At the middle school level, the most common strategy for overcoming barriers was to hold the attitude that students could meet standards if given the support they needed. Support included helping students break down assignments and performance tasks, and giving students extra emotional support. Efforts at collaboration between general and special education staff included working in a "house" or department together and quick collaborating during general education classes. Personnel at the middle school level promoted continuous improvement—looking at the challenges and successes of actual implementation and making changes to improve.

High school personnel are in a unique position because at the time of this study older students, who constitute most of the high school population, could still graduate without passing standards. It will be interesting to watch the activity at the high school level rise as the class of 2002 nears

Table 24. Strategies for Overcoming Barriers and Meeting Ideals

Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Attitude that the majority of kids should attempt general education standards at the state level	Attitude that students can meet standards if given the support they need	Work on helping students feel successful
Individualizing accommodations, modifications, and instruction	Attend district level training on accommodations	Accommodating students
"Pre-teaching," repetition, and modifying tasks to meet student needs	Help students break down assignments and performance tasks	Private tutoring and summer school
Lowering standards so students with disabilities can pass	Developing "special education packages"	Work with students on using accommodations to "level the playing field"
Accommodations lists have been given to parents	Extra emotional support for students	Work on remediation with students after school
Work in small groups within general education settings with all students who need extra help (general and special education students together)	Special education staff work in "house" (group) with general education	Provide academic, social, and emotional support for students
Share information and practices between teachers and schools	Quick collaboration within general education classes	Build community support for the teaching profession
Attend training as teams (general and special education)	Increase collaborative planning time in the summer	
Special education attending general education staff meetings for planning	Evaluate what was/wasn't successful and make necessary changes	
Planning between general and special education after school		
Using IEP to document strategies for meeting standards		
Working on ways to meet standards using class curriculum		

graduation. High school personnel had the fewest and most general strategies. They suggested that work needed to be done to support students and help them feel successful, and students needed to learn to use accommodations.

Discussion

This study found some important implications of the initial implementation of Minnesota's graduation standards that should be considered seriously by state policymakers, statewide trainers, school administrators, general and special educators, related service personnel, and advocates for high standards for all students. Though important and insightful, it is important to remember that this study took place within a small number of schools with a relatively small number of

respondents, making it unfeasible to perform any sophisticated statistical analyses. However, the findings are important enough to recommend further study statewide, with a broad representation of district personnel. The study supports and extends the work cited in the introduction of this report, as will be shown in the discussion of findings that follow.

There were four primary findings in this study:

- Expectations for meeting standards are higher for students with disabilities who are served primarily through general education than for those served primarily in special education resource rooms.
- Most students with mental impairments (developmental disabilities) are not expected to meet high standards.
- Few elementary age students with disabilities use accommodations.
- Educators who have received training on the implementation of high standards are more likely to implement the high standards.

Expectations for Meeting Standards

Findings. This study found that teachers at the middle school level, who provided the majority of their services through team teaching or consultation with general educators in standards-based environments, expected a greater number of their students to meet high standards, worked with more students on using accommodations, and discussed standards with more IEP teams than teachers at other grade levels who provided most or all of their services in separate special education classrooms and resource rooms. Some elementary level special educators discussed discomfort with their current "pullout" services and have begun to work toward redefining their roles and relationships with general educators. This finding relates to the CRESST study described earlier (Aschbacher, 1993), that reported increased teacher expectations for students as a result of the development and implementation of high standards, in addition to changes in curriculum and instruction. Respondents in the McLaughlin et al. study (1999) thought that instruction in high standards would lead to more challenging goals for students with disabilities and that students would be pushed beyond their IEP goals. They also felt that standards would lead to more clear expectations across grades and schools. The CAREI study (Bemis & Wahlstrom, 1999) also reported that several teachers had shifted their beliefs about student capacity for learning to becoming more positive due to unanticipated levels of student performance on high standards.

Recommendations. Study the implications of team teaching and consulting models for special

education services further and provide support, through information, training, and technical assistance, to build this model of service across Minnesota. Building a single educational system that includes all students is an important systemic change that needs to take place in order to raise standards for students with disabilities. Districts need to take a system-wide visionary approach to creating this type of change, using strategic planning processes that identify goals along with specific and practical timelines for change, and involve all school personnel. The CRESST study (Aschbacher, 1993) reported that one of the primary factors that facilitated the development and implementation of standards-based instruction and assessment was a strongly committed district office that was willing to find funding for teachers' professional development, look beyond the district to find necessary expertise, and set up task forces to carry out major development tasks.

Expectations for Students with Mental Impairments

Findings. Teachers of students with mental impairments (developmental disabilities) felt that few students could meet state level standards and that most of them would be exempt. All students with mental impairments served by respondents in this study received special education services outside of general education settings, few used accommodations, and few of their teachers had begun to integrate standards into their IEPs.

Recommendations. Overall, this study shows lower expectations for students with mental impairments than for students with other disabilities, with little inclusion of these students in environments where standards were being implemented and little integration of standards into their IEPs. Insufficient research, models, and training have been developed across the state to address the achievement of high standards by these students. If they are to have opportunities to work toward high standards, several components need to be in place:

- Attitude that standards-based education is for *all* students.
- Strategies for teaching practical skills in a variety of settings to help students with unique learning needs achieve high standards.
- Accommodations developed for individual students.
- Models of IEPs that meet unique student goals and needs and are referenced to high standards.
- Systemic statewide dissemination and training of these models.

Few Elementary Level Students Use Accommodations

Findings. Respondents in this study reported that few students used accommodations at the elementary level, where all students were also served in special education or resource rooms. In the discussion, educators at this level talked about the need to learn about and use more accommodations and modifications with their students. One of the areas especially noted in the McLaughlin study was uncertainty by both special and regular education teachers over when to modify a standard versus using accommodations. They concluded that there must be opportunities for special and regular educators to collaborate to determine the breadth and depth of instruction necessary to help students with disabilities meet standards.

Recommendations. Often, accommodations are not introduced to students until high school. It is important to promote the idea that accommodations can be helpful at the elementary level to help students learn content while working on basic skills. This is an important role of special educators, in collaboration with general educators at this level. In order to teach students about using accommodations, both general and special educators need to be provided with opportunities to learn about accommodations, what helps students learn, and how to help individual students choose what works best for them. Educators also need time to work together to adapt activities designed to help all students meet rigorous standards.

More Training Produces More Change

Findings. About half of the respondents had not experienced any change in their teaching activities or responsibilities since standards were mandated at the beginning of the school year. Most special educators and related service personnel received little to no training on standards implementation and had little to no involvement in the development of district plans for implementation. One school psychologist said that she could not complete the survey at all because her work was completely unrelated to high standards. Since the role of these professionals is to provide educational support to students with disabilities, they need as much training on high standards as any other educator. This study found that the more training respondents had over the previous year, the more likely they were to integrate standards into their IEPs. Overall, participants were frustrated with the lack of time allowed to learn about implementing high standards, to build a more collaborative system between general and special educators, and to learn about and help students use accommodations. These findings concur with those of the CAREI study, which found that teachers who attended more than one training session believed they were more prepared to implement the high standards, and that the implementation of high standards led to a difference in their teaching. The CRESST study also found that teachers thought they needed time to learn about and grow comfortable with performance assessments and learn to make instructional and program decisions based on progress toward standards.

They also needed a great deal of information, practice, models, feedback, and encouragement to grasp the notion of the new standards and attempt to work toward them in their classes.

Recommendations. Make sure that information and training reach ALL school personnel, including special educators and related service providers, along with parents and students. Since district staff provided most training of district personnel, it is important that each district has access to the most up-to-date information and training materials that reflect a growing base of best practice.

Conclusion

The school district participating in this study is working hard toward the implementation of high standards for all of their students. The thoughtful and honest participation of each respondent has provided an excellent springboard for the development of future directions in the development of information and training materials that can be used statewide to increase expectations that all students, including those with disabilities, can work toward and achieve success in meeting high educational standards.

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